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40 First Libby cleanups begin as EPA keeps screening

Associated Press

LIBBY – The first cleanups have begun in Libby, as the federal Environmental Protection Agency continues to screen 3,000 homes for asbestos contamination.

Workers began removing vermiculite insulation from the first home on Monday, using a vacuum truck and sealing the material before burial in a landfill near town. About 50

houses are scheduled to be cleaned this year, officials said.

The deaths of at least 200 residents, and illness among hundreds more, have been linked to asbestos contamination from the former W.R. Grace & Co. vermiculite mine in Libby. The ore was used to make a variety of household products, such as insulation, but it contained harmful tremolite asbestos.

Since 1999, the EPA has been working on an emergency basis to remove asbestos from soil and buildings at the mine site and in town.

About 10 teams from CDM Inc., an environmental engineering firm, have visited more than 1,400 homes in Libby, looking for contaminated soil or insulation, said Paul Peronard of the EPA.

"The basic purpose of this is

to cue up the obvious stuff, and eliminate the obvious nonstarters," Peronard said.

So far, 133 homes have vermiculite insulation, but no other source of contamination, Peronard said. Some 423 have vermiculite outdoors but not in the insulation, and 137 have both, he said. Nine other locations have vermiculite insulation in outbuildings or other structures, he said.

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